

Thursday, March 18, 2004

Flora student pursues angelic calling

By DAWN HINSHAW
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An angel can guard you and see you with pretty eyes, Philip Powell says.

So when Philip paints angels — and he has painted 200 or more — their eyes are alert black dots hovering over a half-circle smile.

“They fly at night,” he says, thinking a moment before adding, “on church nights.”

So he paints their plump bodies floating in a calm pastel sky, aided by wings the shape of overturned hearts.

Philip, 17, is a 10th-grader at A.C. Flora High School who has Down syndrome.

In the past few months, he has found his calling — painting angels that, in their simplicity, make people feel good.

Philip’s first angel appeared on canvas this past summer.

A family friend, Becky McCutchen, was being treated for leukemia with a painful bone-marrow transplant. Philip sent an angel to the hospital to cheer her up.

She encouraged him to paint more.

She says Philip’s angels reflect his view of the world, “a safe, loving, welcoming, happy place.”

He lives with his parents,



TRACY GLANTZ/THE STATE

Philip Powell started painting angels last year to cheer a friend being treated for leukemia. The gesture blossomed into a full-fledged enterprise with art shows and print sales.



Beau and Alice Powell, and his twin sister, Molly, in a home they built at the end of a cul-de-sac, not far from the Forest Acres city line.

The property is thickly wooded, too wild to respond much to landscaping.

Philip spends a lot of time playing in the yard. He’s fascinated with pirates, and his mother says he’s convinced there’s treasure buried there.

His protector is his dog, Harley. For Christmas, he asked for a hunting dog or a motorcycle. He got the dog, so he named her Harley Davidson.

Twice a week, Philip goes to a speech therapist. He has patient, creative ways of explaining himself when people can’t understand. Not long ago, he perceived a “vibration” in the car and, when his mother couldn’t understand the word, he started shaking all over.

Philip says he takes math and reading at school. His mother prompts: “Job skills?”

“I don’t do that part,” Philip

responds. “I love gym. I have a favorite coach.”

While painting provides Philip with a sense of creative accomplishment, his angels leave patrons with a sense of well-being.

He’s had two shows — one at his church, the second at the home of a family friend — and a third is set for next week.

It started in November, when Philip and his sister set up a booth at the Trinity Bazaar. They sold all 37 of Philip’s paintings in no time.

The paintings are \$20 and \$45. Notecards are \$10. Some people went away disappointed when they couldn’t get one.

As much as anything, Molly says, Philip liked being in charge of the fanny pack that held the money.

Money is an abstract concept

to Philip, but he has met a goal of earning enough to buy himself a laptop computer.

Next, he says, he’d like to buy a car phone.

His mother hopes painting will help her son gain independence, perhaps developing into a career.

“Right now he’s into angels, but maybe he’ll get into other creatures, other things,” she says.

“I really think it could be something he could do for the rest of his life.”

Alice Powell says Philip recently told her, “I don’t read that good and I don’t talk that clear and at school I don’t know all the answers, but I can do art.”

McCutchen believes painting has changed his life. “This is something important and something valuable,” she says.

Philip says he’d like for his paintings to end up all over the world.

A map of America, propped up in his basement studio, is dotted with red pushpins in 10 states. His paintings have been purchased by people who’ve taken them to California and Idaho, Florida and New York.

Around the room angels are watching, faithful and smiling.

The Character of Columbia



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